

THE

# Realities of Religion:

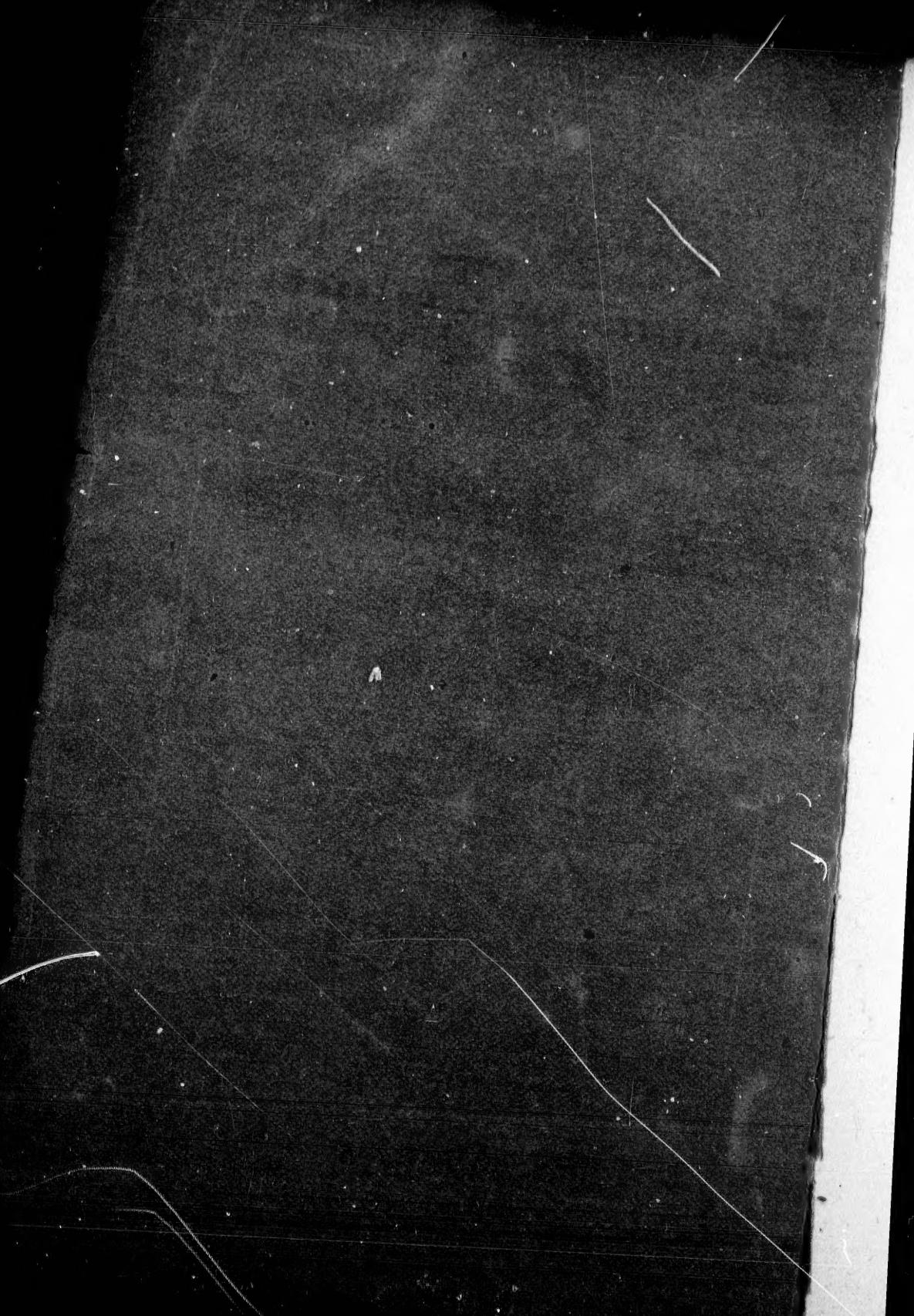
*Being the Circular Letter of the Central Baptist Association of Nova Scotia for the year 1876.*

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By J. M. Cramp, D. D.

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Ex T. W. Clegg 5-5

## THE REALITIES OF RELIGION.

### THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE NOVA SCOTIA CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCHES OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.

*Dear Brethren,—*

The subject of this Letter is "THE REALITIES OF RELIGION:"—and our object in presenting it to your consideration is to produce, by the Lord's blessing, a livelier apprehension of those realities, and a deeper experience of their preciousness and their power.

Although we have not recited any creed in this meeting, as is done in the congregations of another denomination,—and although we do not admit the authority of any human standard of faith or morals, there is happily a substantial agreement among us with regard to the doctrines of the gospel and the duties of believers. We are not bound, indeed, to use the same words in stating or discussing them—for Christian freedom chooses divers modes of expression—but we all receive the same truths, and all our hearts yield to the influences which flow from the belief of those truths.—We believe, for instance, that God "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. i. 9). We believe that "the blood of

Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). We believe that "the washing of regeneration," even "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5) is essential to membership in God's family, here and hereafter. We believe that perseverance in faith and holiness is both a duty and a privilege. We hold that "he that hath the Son bath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John v. 12). This is the substance of our Christianity. Other items of belief need not be enumerated.

Now, correctness or orthodoxy of opinion is not all that is required of a professor of religion. If we really believe the truths that are comprised in the gospel of the Son of God, we are conscious of certain effects. "True holiness" (Ephes. iv. 24) is the holiness of the truth, the necessary effect of the reception of that truth. To be a Christian is to be the subject of specific habits, denoting character, and that character is the result, not of occasional impulses, but of continuous influence. It is to be "joined to the Lord," and to be "one spirit" (1 Cor. vi. 9); it is to "live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20); to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephes. iv. 24); to "forget the things that are behind, and to reach forth to those that are before" (Phil. iii. 13); to conduct ourselves as "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Peter ii. 11); to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 12).

We want soundness in the faith. It is the foundation. But we want something more. Cold, dry theology will not serve the purpose. We must have warm life—affectionate earnestness—a firm grasp of spiritual and heavenly realities.

We must *be* what we profess, and live and act as those who have "put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27).

Have we "fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us" (Heb. vi. 18)? What is now the position in which we stand before God? We are deeply in debt and have nothing to pay; but the debt is paid. We are rebels against the Divine majesty; but the sentence of condemnation is cancelled. Christ's righteousness covers us. Let us enjoy the blessedness, and delight ourselves in the Lord. Let us exclaim, with Toplady—

"A debtor to mercy alone,  
Of covenant mercy I sing,  
Nor fear, with his righteousness on,  
My person and offerings to bring:  
The terrors of law and of God  
With me can have nothing to do;  
My Saviour's obedience and blood  
Hide all my transgressions from view."

Let us sing, with Oliver—

"He by Himself hath sworn,  
I on his oath depend,  
I shall, on eagle wings upborne,  
To heaven ascend:  
I shall behold his face,  
I shall his power adore,  
And sing the wonders of his grace  
For evermore."

As believers in Jesus we are sons and daughters of the Most High, and entitled to all the privileges of the adoption. How valuable—how precious they are!—We share in love which, as Leighton says, "exceeds that of mothers in tenderness, and that of fathers in wisdom." We are watched over, cared for, by God himself: and to his

fatherly grace we may take all our wants, all our griefs, all our dangers, with the assurance that He, the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort," "thinketh upon us" (2 Cor. i. 8; Psalm xl. 17). Believing this, we are "not afraid of evil tidings" (Psalm. cxii. 7), and we have learned to say, when floods rise high and tempests roar, "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. iii. 18).

The covenant of heavenly love, the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. xxiii. 5), secures to us mercies, dignities, and glories unspeakable. We are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). All things are ours—all Divine perfections—all Providences—all spiritual influences, gifts, and graces. We are fully provided for while in the wilderness, and a rich inheritance awaits us at the end of the journey.

"This world is ours, and worlds to come,  
Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home."

All this is true and real. It is actual matter of fact. The question then is, not merely what we believe, but what we *are*, or, to what extent we realize the blessedness of God's chosen, and live in the habitual enjoyment of the privileges which are common to all Christians. Some persons, as it appears to us, have fallen into a great mistake. They imagine that there is both a common and a higher Christian life, and they separate Christians into two classes; unmindful that personal godliness, as described in the New Testament, is attainable by all believers, and that there cannot be anything higher—and, forgetful of the fact that the Apostle Paul, who unquestionably rose to the highest style of devotedness to the Saviour, disclaimed all superior-

ity, and said, " Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect " (Phil. iii. 12). Be it ours to follow so noble an example, and to resolve, by the grace of God, that we will be whatever a Christian may or ought to be—that we will carry into practice all our professions—and that we will " hold on our way," and " be stronger and stronger " (Job xvii. 9).

This realising experience is necessary as a sustaining element of Christian activity. The Lord Jesus calls upon us all to labour for him. Every member of a Christian church is bound to be a worker, for the salvation of others, and for the edification of his fellow-members. But we shall neither be fit for work nor able to sustain a steady course of action unless our souls are constantly nourished by gospel truth—intelligently apprehended, enjoyed, and felt—penetrating and inspiriting every power. And we all know that such a state is attainable, because we remember the words of our Lord—" If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him," (Luke xi. 13). These words are as true to-day as they were when they were first uttered. But in pleading the promise let us bear in mind that we must " ask in faith, nothing wavering : for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed ; let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord " (James i. 6, 7).

Brethren, " the time is short " (1 Cor. vii. 29). Some of us are young and strong, and may hope for long lives of consecration to Christ. But a considerable number have

passed the meridian. The day is far spent. The time of our departure may be at hand. Our remaining stay upon earth is not to be reckoned by years; it is not to be reckoned at all. The Saviour says, "Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is" (Mark xi. 33). Does it not especially behove us to spend the few days that are left us in full harmony with our professions and our prospects, and to "gird up the loins of our minds, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 13). Let us climb to Pisgah's top, and "view the landscape o'er." Let us familiarise ourselves with the grand outlook, and be as "men that wait for their Lord" (Luke xii. 36). Glorious visions are to be beheld by the ransomed Church of God. If we belong to that Church, we shall take part in events of the most solemn and inspiring character. The Lord Jesus will be "revealed from heaven, with his mighty angels, in flaming fire" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8);—we shall see him come.—The archangel's trumpet will summon the nations to God's bar (1 Cor. xv. 52 : 1 Thess. iv. 16);—we shall hear it.—The world's population from the beginning to the close of the history will be gathered together before the judgment seat:—we shall be there, and each one in his own proper place, nor will there be any mistake in the allotments. We shall hear the Judge when he welcomes the saved to the heavenly mansions. We shall hear him when he dismisses the lost. And oh! what ecstatic delight will thrill through every saved soul, when "a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, " shall stand

on Zion's hill, and the voice of the univeral Church shall be heard, "as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth,"—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing" (Rev. v. 12 : vii. 9 : xix. 6). Brethren, shall we be there? Shall we join in that song? Shall we take part in the triumph of the glorified, and dwell with them in the presence of the Lord for ever?

"For ever with the Lord"—

Amen: so let it be!

Life from the dead is in that word,

'Tis immortality.

Here in the body pent

Absent from him I roam,

Yet nightly pitch my moving tent

A day's march nearer home."

Yes—"nearer home": for "our citizenship [conversation] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Then—"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John iii. 3). Having this hope, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness" (2 Pet. iii. 11)!

"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen" (Jude 24, 25).

## APPENDIX.

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Had space permitted, some observations might have been made on another “*reality*”—the presence of the Lord Jesus with his people. That Jesus is present with his people, that he helps, blesses, comforts them—is believed by all true christians. But there is reason to fear that it is held by many rather as a *truth* than as a *fact*, and that few of us so realize the fact as to deal with it practically, and to derive from it the relief and comfort which might be enjoyed. We seem to regard Christ as an *abstraction* rather than as a *person*, and to reason about him instead of dealing with him. Thoughtful men, especially those of cold, metaphysical natures, are more likely to be affected in this way than those whose religion mainly consists in emotion ; yet all are liable to the evil—for *it is* an evil, and a very injurious one. Brethren ! let us entertain worthier thoughts of our Lord. If a friend of ours is on the other side of the globe, and we need his advice or help, we know how to put ourselves into communication with him, and we have no doubt of the reality of that communication, or of its results. Our Lord and Saviour is farther from us than any of our fellow-men can be ; and yet he is ineffably near ; and what is more, he does not need to wait till he is applied to, since he knows us altogether, and has a perfect understanding of every case. Let us regard him as our friend—living—ever-living—ever living “to make intercession for us”—and go to him in all exigencies “in full assurance of faith.”

I append some passages from the writings of the Rev. Richard Cecil, which appear to me strikingly illustrative and confirmatory of the statements already made :

"The writings of infidels must be read with caution and fear. There are cold, intellectual, speculative, malignant foes to Christianity. I dare not tamper with such, when I am in my right mind. I have received serious injury, for a time, even when my duty has called me to read what they have to say. The daring impiety of Belsham's answer to Wilberforce ruffled the calm of my spirit. I read it over when at Bath, in the autumn of 1798. I waked in pain, about two o'clock in the morning. I tried to cheer myself by an exercise of faith on Jesus Christ. I lifted up my heart to Him, as sympathizing with me, and engaged to support me. Many times have I thus obtained quiet and repose: but now I could lay no hold on him: I had given the enemy an advantage over me: my habit had imbibed poison: my nerves trembled: my strength was gone! 'Jesus Christ sympathize with you and relieve you! It is all enthusiasm! It is idolatry! Jesus Christ has preached his sermons, and done his duty, and is gone to heaven! And there he is, as other good men are! Address your prayers to the Supreme Being!' I obtain relief in such cases by dismissing from my thoughts all that enemies or friends can say. I will have nothing to do with Belsham or with Wilberforce. I come to Christ himself. I hear what he says. I turn over the Gospels. I read his conversations. I dwell especially on his farewell discourses with his disciples, in St. John's Gospel. If there be meaning in words, and if Christ were not a deceiver or deceived, the reality of the Christian's life, in Him and from Him by faith, is written there as with a sun-beam."—*Remains*.

"I feel many sweet and strong ties to the present life, in my family and in my Church, to which all earthly possessions bear no comparison; yet, to 'depart and be with Christ' is doubtless 'far better.' But I have been this morning perplexed with the consideration that when I shall 'see Him as He is' I shall not be able to forgive myself for

not having served him better. I know not how to separate the idea of self-reproach from heavenly enjoyment.

“Sitting in my blankets, with this Bible before me, I seem like old Elwes with a bushel of bank notes and India bonds: but with this difference, that he must have his all taken away, and I shall take all mine with me.

“I am astonished, and even confounded, when I recollect with what prodigality we ministers are accustomed to waste our time. A minister spending his strength and talents merely to entertain his acquaintance, is a ‘foolish Virgin’ wasting his oil to light up a puppet-show, I purpose, in the strength of God, that the few drops which I have remaining shall be consecrated to the lighting of wanderers to the Door, or pilgrims on their Way.

“The moment my soul departs from this body it will be more separate from the present world in which I live, than if it were at this instant placed beyond the orb of Saturn; and yet, at the orb of Saturn, what a mere nonentity would this present world be! But, to be placed at such an inconceivable distance from my present station, and to be there *alone*, though out of absolute pain, shocks the mind: on the other hand, to be there, or anywhere else, under a sense of divine favour, and with the presence of Christ, makes that state no *solitude*, and this world no *loss*.”—*Fragment written in an illness, in the year 1799.*

“The knowledge of Jesus Christ is a wonderful mystery. Some men think they preach Christ gloriously, because they name him every two minutes in their sermons. But that is not preaching Christ. To understand, and enter into, and open his various offices and characters—the glories of his person and work—his relation to us, and ours to Him, and to God the Father and God the Spirit through him—this is the knowledge of Christ. The Divines of the present day are stunted dwarfs in this knowledge, compared with the great men of the last age. To know Jesus Christ for our-

selves, is to make him a CONSOLATION,—DELIGHT,—STRENGTH,—RIGHTEOUSNESS,—COMPANION,—and END.”—*Remains.*

In the summer of 1816 I supplied the Rev. Mark Wilks' pulpit, at Norwich, England, for five weeks, during which time I preached twenty sermons—a formidable undertaking for a lad of twenty. While there, I met with the Works of the Rev. Richard Cecil, and read them with peculiar satisfaction. I placed a copy in my own library, and have read the entire Works many times since. Latterly I have read them once a year, and always with pleasure and profit.

Mr. Elliot Stock has recently published a new edition of Cecil's *Remains*, edited by Miss Catherine Cecil, the author's daughter. That book is a mine of rich thoughts, and will repay continual exploration. It should be in every minister's library.



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